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ABSTRACT

Through the study of several works of art by Albert Bierstadt, George Catlin, Winslow Homer, and Thomas Moran, this resource explores the way that people felt about their growing nation during the period of westward expansion until the end of the 19th century. It introduces students to basic principles of landscape painting and has students practice geography skills to gain appreciation for the physical characteristics of different regions of the United States. Lesson plans and suggestions are provided. Black and white reproductions of work by several artists are provided for use with suggested activities. (MM)

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ED 398 169

ART to ZOO

TEACHING WITH THE POWER OF OBJECTS

Smithsonian Institution

March/April 1996

LANDSCAPE PAINTING: Artists Who Love the Land

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Lesson Plan
Take-Home Page in English/Spanish

Art
Geography
Language Arts
U.S. History

4–9

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SO 026 883

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Introduction

Lesson Plan Step 1

Activity Page 1A

Activity Page 1B

Activity Page 1C

Activity Page 1D

Lesson Plan Step 2

Activity Page 2

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Take-Home Page in Spanish

Resources

Art to Zoo's purpose is to help teachers bring into their classrooms the educational power of museums and other community resources.

Art to Zoo draws on the Smithsonian's hundreds of exhibitions and programs—from art, history, and science to aviation and folklife—to create classroom-ready materials for grades four through nine.

Each of the four annual issues explores a single topic through an interdisciplinary, multicultural approach.

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LANDSCAPE PAINTING:
Artists Who Love the Land

How does an artist create a landscape? A landscape artist is a sort of magician who can create a whole world on a piece of flat canvas. This world, of course, is made of paint. Trees that seem thick with foliage are made with a few flicks of a paintbrush. Lakes that shine, waterfalls that splash, grasses that bend in the wind, and dark clouds that promise rain are all made of colors squeezed out of a paint tube. How amazing it is that small dabs and smears of color can create places for us to go in our imagination: a placid river winding around hills, a rocky shoreline where we can almost hear the crashing waves, an enormous canyon that seems to stretch miles deep into the distance.

Air is an important part of any landscape as well, although we seldom give it much thought. An artist has to paint the air so skillfully that we seem to feel the heat of the sun and the rush of the wind. He or she has to make us believe that it might take hours for a bird to fly from one side of the picture frame to the other. All of this is hard to do. There are no paint tubes for sale labeled "sunshine," "frosty air," "gentle breeze," or "gloomy day." An artist has to create the wind, the sunshine, and the mist with the paint at the end of the brush.

It is important to remember that a landscape artist is not a camera that records whatever happens to be in front of the lens. He is not required to paint exactly what he sees. If he feels that there are too many trees on a hill, he can leave some of them out of his picture. If he thinks the trees are in the wrong place, he can move them around. If a riverbank looks too empty, he can add a few rocks that aren't really there.

A landscape artist also has to decide what she wants us to see. If she is painting a field, she has to decide whether she wants us to see each blade of grass or whether she wants us to see the field as a smear of color. She can paint her landscape so that we see the field from above, as if we were looking down from an airplane, or from the ground, as if we were lying flat on a picnic blanket.

Before making any of these decisions, the landscape artist must decide whether to work outdoors on the land or indoors in the studio. Working outdoors allows him to observe the colors of nature—the soil, the clouds, and the reflections on water. He can study the patterns of sunlight and shadow that change with every passing moment. On the other hand, if he chooses to paint inside his studio, he can work more slowly, rearrange the composition, and adjust the colors and shapes to his own way of seeing. Many artists find both methods useful. They make sketches outdoors and then do the actual painting back in their studio.

CREATING ILLUSIONS

No matter where the landscape artist chooses to set up his easel, he will have to confront the central problem posed by all landscapes—creating the illusion of deep space on a flat canvas. When done well, the effect can be spellbinding. We feel that we can enter the painting and continue walking for miles.

Landscape artists know that there are certain techniques that work. Five "space tricks" that students can try out for themselves are described in this *Art to Zoo*:

1. A winding path.
A path or river that winds through the landscape from foreground to background can make us believe that the picture describes a deep space.

2. Changes in size.
A tree that is close to us appears much larger than a tree of the same size that is far away.

3. Overlap.
A boulder that is close to us overlaps and partially hides a much larger cliff behind it.

4. Changes in clarity.
A distant mountain range appears more hazy and less distinct than a mountain that is closer.

5. Diagonal composition.
Land that moves away from us on the diagonal appears to move back into space.

George Catlin, Thomas Moran, Albert Bierstadt, and Winslow Homer were four American artists who used these techniques well. Their ultimate purpose was not so much to impress us with their ability to fool our eyes but to create pictures that portray the great size and splendor of the American landscape.

Catlin, Moran, and Bierstadt were artist/explorers who were lured west by the raw power of unexplored rivers, mountains, and canyons. They joined geological and surveying expeditions into our nation's then-unexplored territories, making a visual record of the land with their paintings. Homer, on the other hand, preferred the East; his passion was the rocky Atlantic seacoast of Maine. All four painters helped Americans see and love their land in a time when photography was still in its infancy and travel films did not exist. Today television floods us with images, and we can easily travel by car, train, or plane to whatever river, mountain, canyon, or seacoast we wish to visit. Yet the silent paintings of these artists still speak to us of the majesty of our land.

Through the study of several works of art, this issue of *Art to Zoo* explores the way that Americans felt about their growing nation during the period of westward expansion until the end of the nineteenth century. It introduces students to some basic principles of landscape painting and has them practice geography skills to gain appreciation for the physical characteristics of different regions of the United States. All of the paintings discussed in this issue are in the collections of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American Art.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

George Catlin

George Catlin was an easterner who had been fascinated with Native Americans since boyhood. When he was thirty-four years old, he decided that painting pictures of Native Americans would be far more interesting than being a lawyer. So, in 1830 he headed west. For six years, he moved from village to village, using the Missouri River as a means of travel. He painted portraits of tribal chiefs and scenes of buffalo hunts, dances, and other Native American ceremonies.

Thomas Moran

Thomas Moran was an eastern artist who enjoyed going on geological expeditions, although he was not the rugged type. He joined an expedition to the remote headwaters of the Yellowstone River in Wyoming and, two years later, went to the Grand Canyon, which he sketched many times from an overlook called "Powell's Plateau." When he returned to his studio in the East, he combined ideas from his small sketches to produce enormous paintings. By then he had established a fine reputation as an artist, and his glorious watercolors of Yellowstone had encouraged Congress in 1872 to designate it as the nation's first national park.

Albert Bierstadt

Albert Bierstadt went to California in 1859 with a land-surveying team after the gold rush had aroused the curiosity of the entire nation. At that time, easterners had to learn about the magnificent California wilderness from small black-and-white photographs brought home by land surveyors. But Bierstadt was an artist with a shrewd business sense. He knew that if he produced impressive, panoramic "great pictures" of California, easterners would pay money to see them.

Winslow Homer

In 1893, Winslow Homer left his busy life in New York and built a studio in an old stable on the high shore of Prout's Neck in Maine, only a few hundred feet from the ocean. He loved walking on the cliffs during fierce storms to study the way the surf did battle with the rocks. On more pleasant days, he had little interest in the water. When the ocean was calm, he thought it looked like "a duck pond."

LESSON PLAN
Step 1

VIEWS OF THE AMERICAN WEST: TRUE OR FALSE?

Objectives

- To understand that a landscape painting may or may not accurately represent a specific place.
- To identify techniques that create the illusion of three-dimensional space on a flat surface.

Materials

- Copies of Activity Pages 1A–D.
- Pens or pencils.
- Map of the western United States.

Subjects

Art, geography, U.S. history

Procedure

1. Give each student a photocopy of Activity Pages 1A–C, which show three views of the American West. After they have studied the images for a few minutes, ask students the following questions: Which painting was painted outdoors? Which painting was painted in an indoor studio from sketches made outdoors? Which painting was painted outside of the United States?

2. Introduce students to *River Bluffs, 1,320 Miles above St. Louis* by George Catlin on Activity Page 1A.

A. Ask them to describe the painting, making sure that they notice the winding river with occasional islands; the conical hills, or "bluffs"; the Native American man; the scarcity of trees; the lack of buildings and roads; and the wide-open sky.

B. Use a map of the western United States to locate the two-thousand–mile stretch of the Missouri River between Fort Union, North Dakota, and Saint Louis, Missouri. Estimate where 1,320 miles above Saint Louis would be. Explain that during the years before trains and cars were invented, traveling by boat along the Missouri River was one of the only ways to reach the West. Indian villages, fur-trading posts, and forts were built along its banks.

C. Refer to the "About the artists" section on page 4 to introduce students to George Catlin. Have them read Catlin's description on Activity Page 1A of how he painted *River Bluffs, 1,320 Miles above St. Louis*. Ask them what they can learn from his words that they might not be able to see from the black-and-white reproduction of his painting.

D. Read space trick 1 to students:

SPACE TRICK 1
Catlin uses a winding river to lead into space.

Ask students to put a finger on the river at the lower left corner of the picture. This part of the river, closest to the front, is in the *foreground*. Ask them to move their fingers along the river until they reach the islands. This is the *middleground*. When they have moved their fingers as far back as they can go along the river, they are in the *background*. Ask students to run their fingers along the bumpy line where the top of the bluffs meets the sky. This line, called the *horizon line*, is the farthest point that the eye can see.

E. Read space trick 2 to students:

SPACE TRICK 2
Catlin makes foreground forms larger than background forms.

Tell students to compare the height of the bluffs in the foreground with the height of the bluffs in the background. Explain that Catlin had to make them different sizes to create the illusion of deep space. Ask students to measure the height of the man and then draw a second person exactly the same size on one of the islands in the middle ground and on one of the bluffs on the horizon line. Discuss why the results are so comical.

3. Introduce *The Chasm of the Colorado* by Thomas Moran on Activity Page 1B.

A. Ask students to describe this place, making sure that they notice the massive rock cliffs, the small patch of grass (the only vegetation), the mighty storm breaking over part of the canyon, and the steam rising between the rocks.

B. Use a map of the western United States to locate the Colorado River, which cuts through the Grand Canyon in northern Arizona.

C. Use the "About the artists" section on page 4 to introduce Thomas Moran. Explain that, although he had

LESSON PLAN
Step 1 (continued)

never before spent much time in the outdoors, during his first few expeditions he quickly became used to traveling by horse through unknown territory. Ask students if they have ever succeeded in doing something for which they felt ill-equipped at first.

D. Have students look at Moran's painting and read his description of the Grand Canyon on Activity Page 1B. Have them list words that would describe his view of the Grand Canyon.

E. Read space trick 3 to students:

SPACE TRICK 3
Moran overlaps the rocks.

Ask students to put one of their hands in front of the other to see how the closer hand overlaps and partially hides the hand behind it. Explain that Moran arranged rocks and cliffs in the same way. The rocks that you see in full appear closest. Those that are partially obscured appear farther back.

4. Introduce *Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains, California* by Albert Bierstadt on Activity Page 1C.

A. Ask students to locate the alpine peak, waterfall, herd of deer, and flock of ducks among the grasses in Bierstadt's painting.

B. Use a map of the western United States to locate the Sierra Nevada Mountains in eastern California. These are the highest and steepest mountains in the United States. They include Yosemite National Park.

C. Refer to the "About the artists" section on page 4 to introduce Albert Bierstadt. Tell students two facts about *Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains, California*:

Although the scene looks extraordinarily realistic, nobody has ever found a place in the Sierra Nevadas that looks exactly like it.

Bierstadt painted *Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains, California* while he was in Europe, nine years after leaving California.

Ask students if they can explain the first fact by the second. If they cannot, ask them to make a small sketch of an outdoor place they visited a long time ago. When they are finished, ask them to describe what they remembered about the place. Press them for details, such as the exact shape of the tree or the precise position of the sun. If they are unable to remember all the details, ask them how they were able to draw their picture. When they admit that they made up many of the details, tell them that Bierstadt did the same thing.

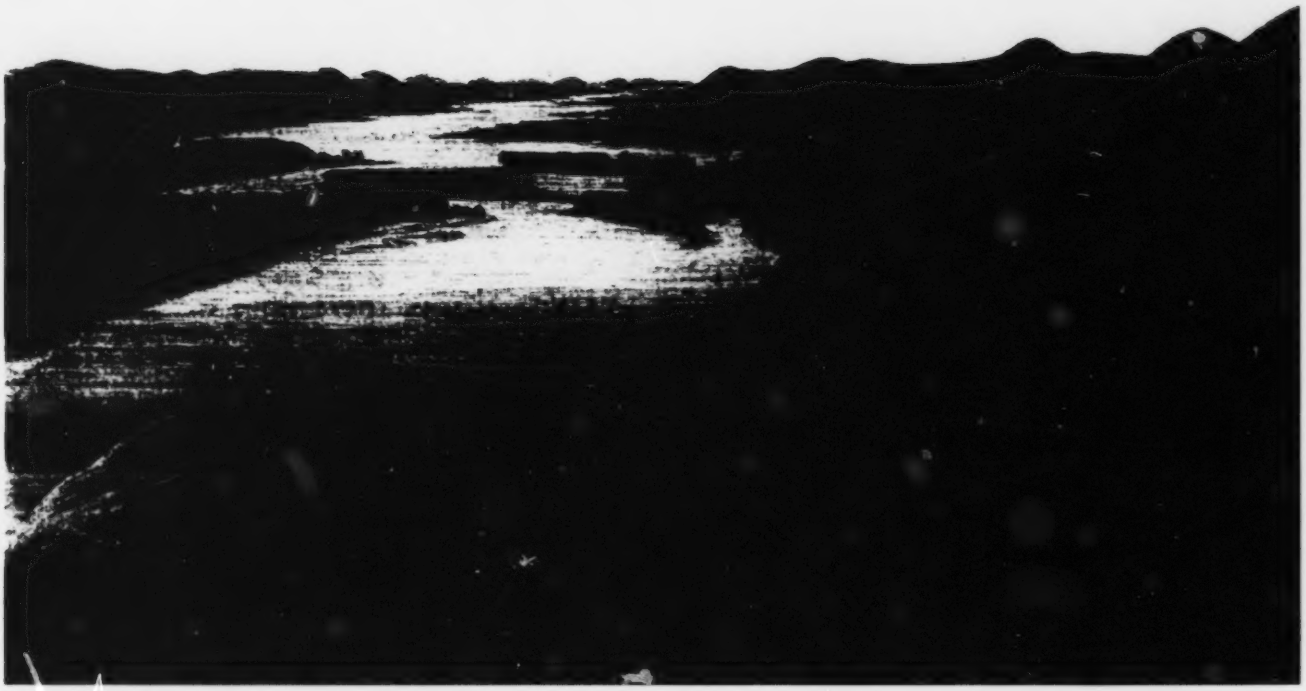
D. Tell students that Bierstadt also changed the shape of the Sierra Nevada Mountains because he knew that Americans wanted to think that their native mountains were more majestic than those of Europe. Give each student a photocopy of Activity Page 1D. Have them compare these photographs of actual mountains—Mount Matterhorn in the Swiss Alps and the Sierra Nevadas in California—with the mountains in Bierstadt's painting (Activity Page 1C). Have students guess which mountains Bierstadt used as a model for the highest snow-covered peak in his painting. Ask them if they approve of Bierstadt's method of combining and manipulating sketches from many locations to compose a scene that looks realistic.

E. Read space trick 4 to students:

SPACE TRICK 4
Bierstadt makes the distant mountains hazy and indistinct.

Ask students to use their fingers to trace the outline of the cliff on the left side of the painting. Then ask them to use their fingers to trace the outline of the most distant mountain they can find in the picture. Ask them why Bierstadt made the outline of the closer cliff so much clearer than the outline of the distant mountain. Explain that when we are outdoors, the atmosphere between our eye and a distant mountain (not to mention the imperfections of human vision) makes its outline appear less distinct.

ACTIVITY PAGE 1A



George Catlin, *River Bluffs, 1,320 Miles above St. Louis*

In the artist's words: "I took my easel and canvas and brushes to the top of the bluff, and painted two views from the same spot. These hills [were] five or six hundred feet high and every foot of them, as far as they can be discovered in distance, covered with a vivid green turf. From this enchanting spot there was nothing to arrest the eye from ranging over [the Missouri's] waters for the distance of twenty or thirty miles."

William H. Truettner, *The Natural Man Observed: A Study of Catlin's Indian Gallery* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979), p. 247.

ACTIVITY PAGE 1B

Thomas Moran
The Chasm of the Colorado

In the artist's words: "I was completely carried away by its [the Grand Canyon's] magnificence. I will not attempt to say anything about it as no words can express the faintest notion of it."

Ron Tyler, *Visions of America: Pioneer Artists in a New Land* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1983), p. 58.

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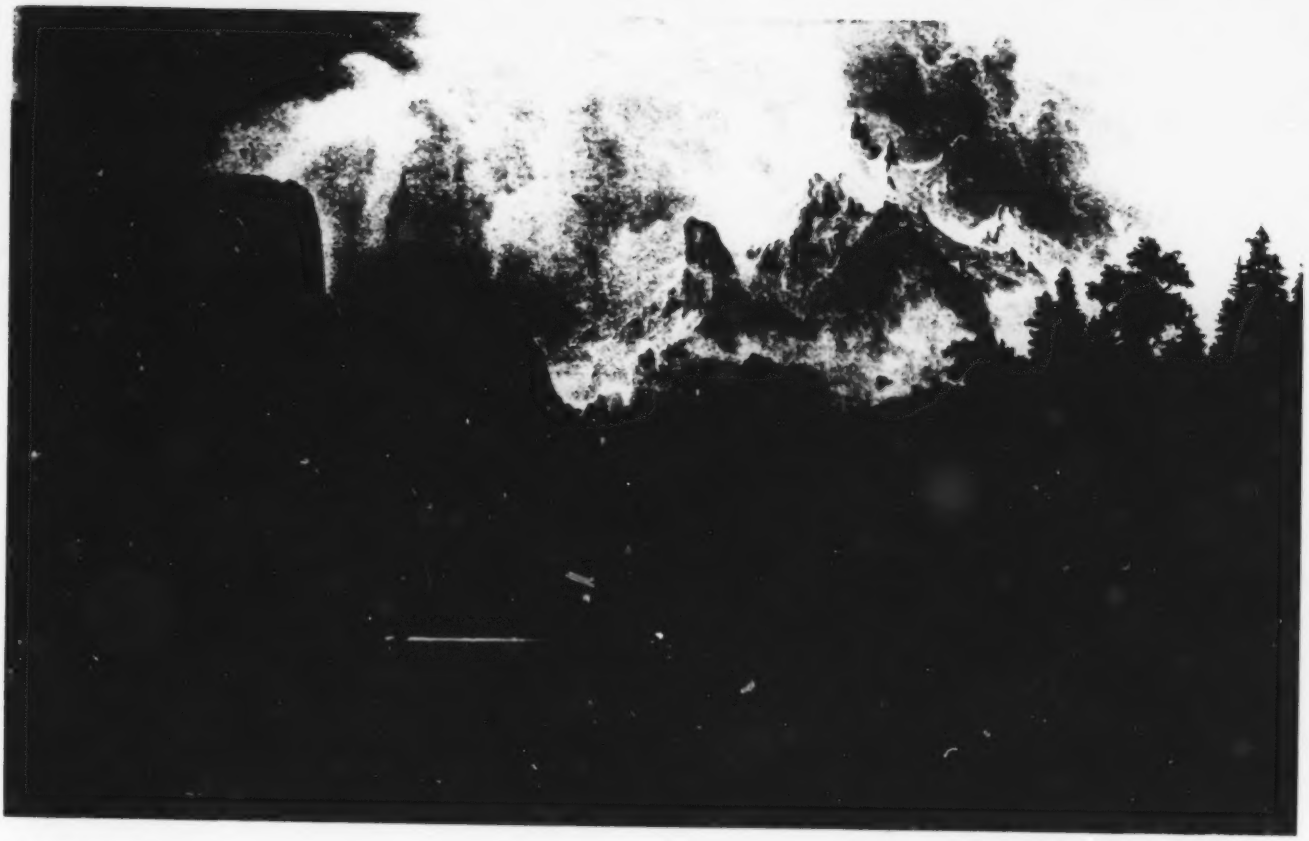
ACTIVITY PAGE 1C



Albert Bierstadt
Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains, California

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ACTIVITY PAGE 1D

Mount Matterhorn,
southern Switzerland

Ansel Adams
Yosemite Valley, winter, from Inspiration Point

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LESSON PLAN
Step 2

THE ROCKY SHORE

Objectives

- To compare a realistic landscape painting with a photograph of the same place.
- To use space tricks to create a landscape painting.

Materials

- Copies of Activity Page 2.
- Map of Maine.
- Take-Home Page.

Subjects

- Art, geography

Procedure

1. Introduce Winslow Homer's *High Cliff, Coast of Maine* by giving each student a photocopy of Activity Page 2. Ask students to describe the cliff that slopes down to meet the ocean. Is it smooth or rough? How steep is it? If they went for a walk on the lower part of this cliff, would they want to wear shoes?

2. Use a map of Maine to point out Prout's Neck, a rocky peninsula jutting out into the Atlantic Ocean just south of Portland. High Cliff, the subject of Homer's painting, is the steepest rock wall on Prout's Neck. During storms, the waves crash up against it.

3. Use the "About the artists" section on page 4 to tell students about Winslow Homer. Ask them to imagine that they are standing close enough to the bottom of the painting to get their feet wet. How long would it take them to walk to the top of the painting? Make sure they look closely at the upper right-hand corner—they will find a surprising clue.

4. Have students read Homer's words below his painting on Activity Page 2. Ask them how the artistic methods of Homer differ from those of Bierstadt. To extend the activity, have students stage a mock debate between the two artists to argue the advantages and disadvantages of composing landscape paintings indoors and outdoors.

5. Ask them to compare Homer's painting of High Cliff with a 1938 photograph of High Cliff taken from the same point of view. Discuss the weather in each picture. What was it like on the day Homer made his painting? What was it like on the day the photograph was taken? Ask students how Homer's painting emphasizes the way that the sea and land cut into each other.

6. Have students look for a horizon line in the photograph and in Homer's painting. Discuss how the artist's elimination of a horizon line allows him to fit in more of the rough ocean. Read space trick 5 to students:

SPACE TRICK 5
Homer makes the scene appear to stretch far back into space by using a diagonal line between land and sea.

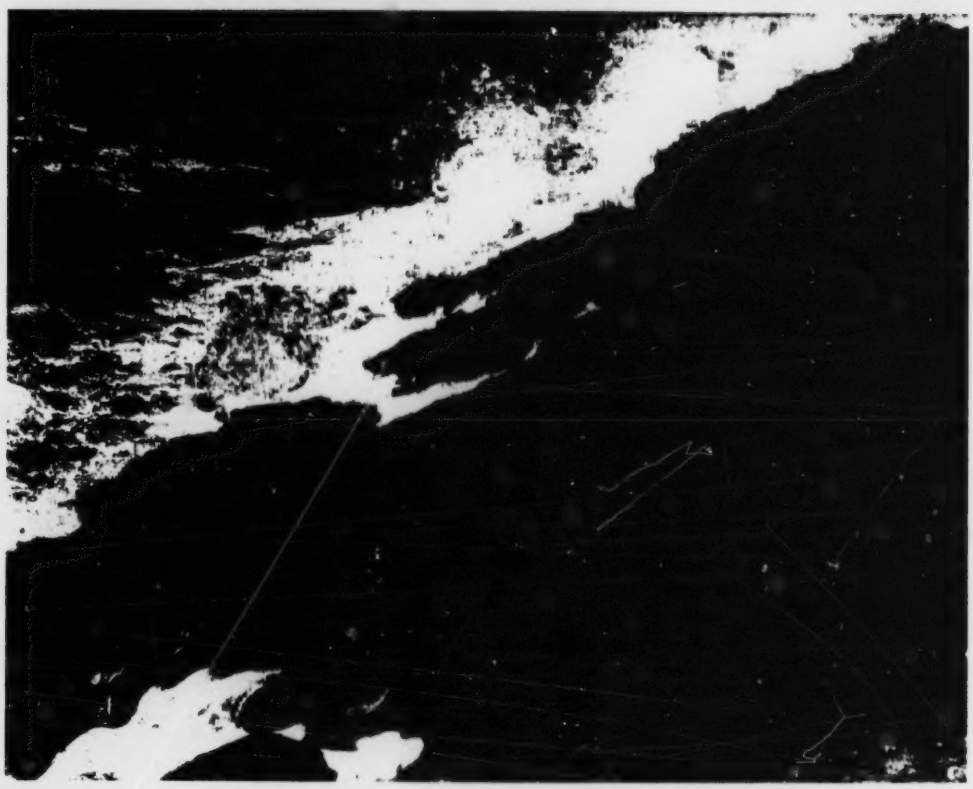
Ask students to imagine the line separating land and sea as horizontal instead of diagonal. How far back would the land take them? If the land were horizontal, would the three figures look like full-sized people or small dolls?

7. Hand out copies of the Take-Home Page and tell students that they will each be creating their own interpretation of the scene on that page as homework or in class. First, have them imagine walking around in the photograph, asking themselves the following questions: Where would I go first? Is the land hilly or flat? What is growing in this place? What is the weather like? Does anything about this place puzzle or surprise me? Remind students of the five space tricks that landscape artists use. Have them try to incorporate these tricks into their own interpretation of the picture.

8. In class, discuss and compare students' interpretations. Refer to the Nast print on the cover, which shows how every artist sees a landscape from his or her own point of view.

ACTIVITY PAGE 2

Philip C. Beam, *High Cliff, Prout's Neck*



Winslow Homer, *High Cliff, Coast of Maine*

In the artist's words: "I prefer . . . a picture composed and painted outdoors. This making studies and then taking them home to use them is only half right. You get composition but you lose freshness."

Lloyd Goodrich, *Winslow Homer* (New York: The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1973), p. 28.

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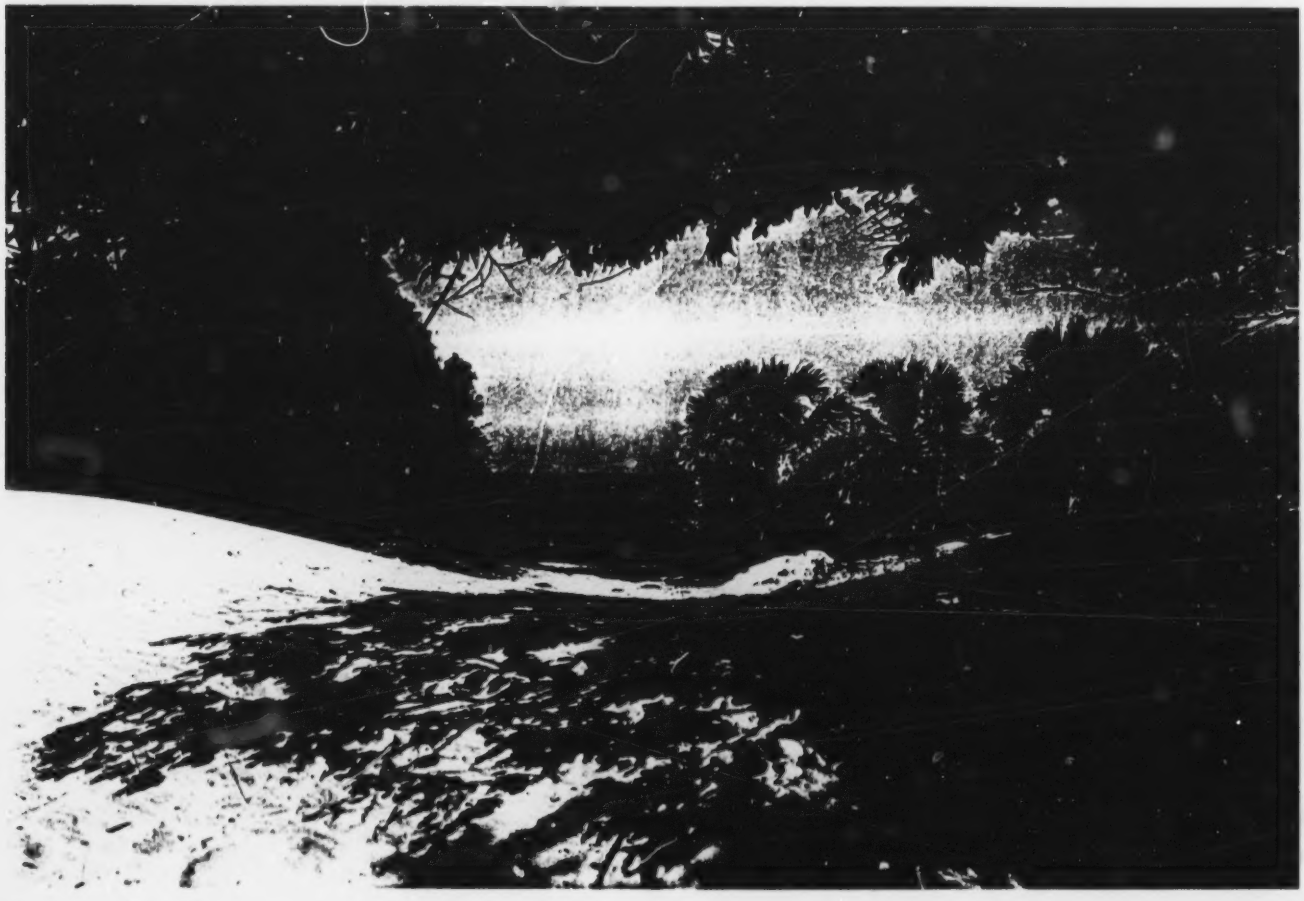
TAKE-HOME PAGE
You're the Artist

To the teacher
- Duplicate this page for students.
- Use with Lesson Plan Step 2.

Publication of *Art to Zoo* is made possible through the generous support of the Pacific Mutual Foundation.

Directions: Make a landscape based on the photograph on this page. As the landscape artist, you can use colored pencils, markers, crayons, paints, pieces of cloth, or colored paper. Try to use some of the techniques used by George Catlin, Thomas Moran, Albert Bierstadt, Winslow Homer, or other landscape artists you like.



Cumberland Island,
Georgia

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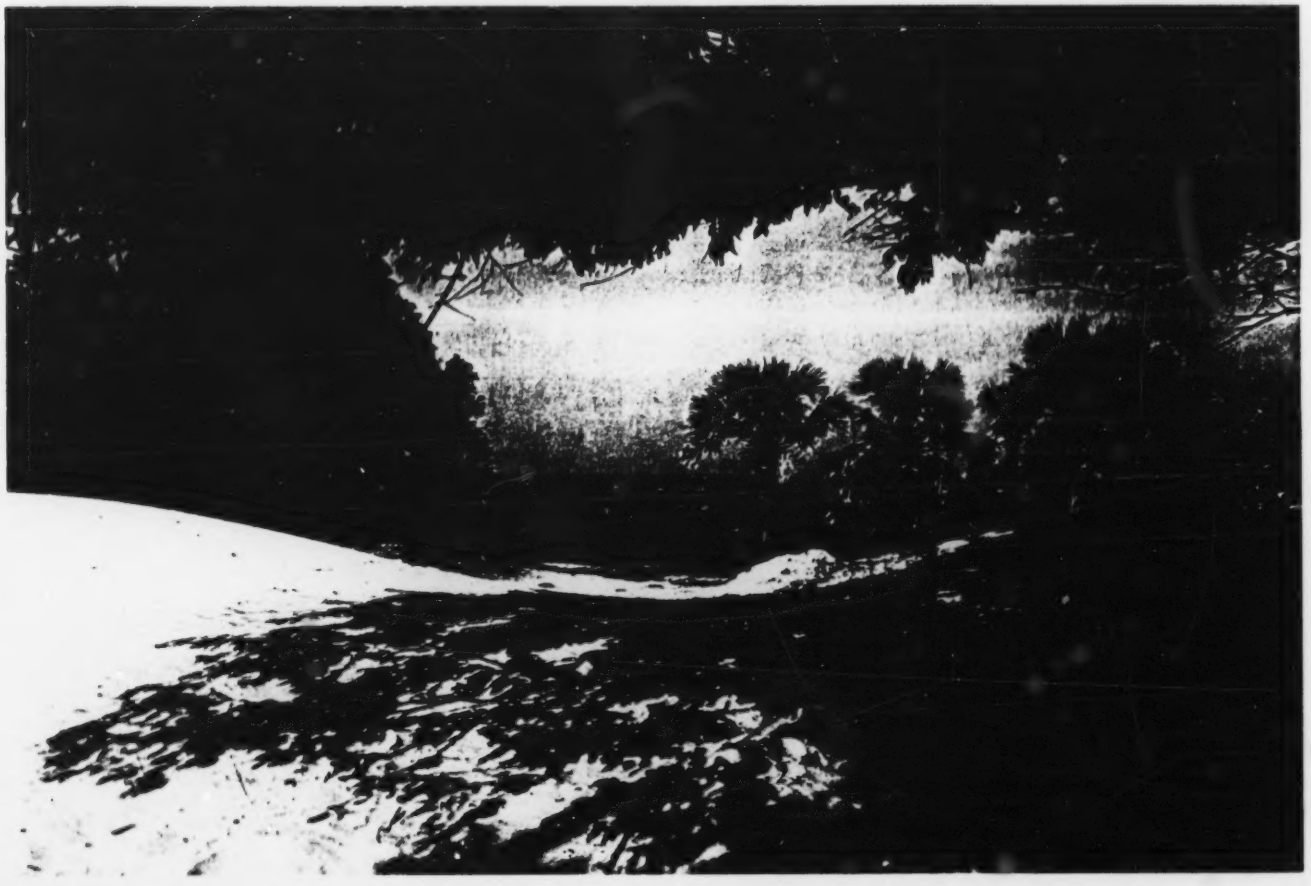
TRABAJO PARA HACER EN LA CASA
Tu Eres el o la Paisajista

Al maestro (a)
- Copie esta página para los alumnos.
- Usela con el segundo paso del plan de la lección.

Esta publicación ha sido posible gracias al generoso aporte de la Pacific Mutual Foundation.

Instrucciones: Haz un paisaje basado en la fotografía que ves. Como paisajista, puedes usar lápices de colores, marcadores, pinturas, pedacitos de papel de colores o retazos de telas. Trata de usar algunas de las técnicas artísticas que usaron los paisajistas George Catlin, Thomas Moran, Albert Bierstadt, Winslow Homer u otros que te gusten.



Cumberland Island,
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RESOURCES

BOOKS

The artists and their work

Anderson, Nancy K., and Linda S. Ferber. *Albert Bierstadt: Art and Enterprise*. New York: Hudson Hills Press in association with the Brooklyn Museum, 1990.

Beam, Philip C., Lois Homer Graham, Patricia Junker, David Tatham, and John Wilmerding. *Winslow Homer in the 1890s: Prout's Neck Observed*. New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1990.

Flexner, James Thomas. *The World of Winslow Homer*. New York: Time, Incorporated, 1966.

Kloss, William. *Treasures from the National Museum of American Art*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985.

Landscape painting

Gussow, Alan. *A Sense of Place: The Artist and the American Land*. New York: Seabury Press, 1971.

Trenton, Patricia, and Peter H. Hassorick. *The Rocky Mountains: A Vision for Artists in the Nineteenth Century*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983.

TEACHER RESOURCES

Lewis, Tony, and Thomas Goehner. *Land and Landscape: Views of America's History and Culture*. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1994. This study guide is included in the museum's media-based resource kit, which also contains a video and workbook. Distributor: Crystal Productions, 1812 Johns Drive, P.O. Box 2159, Glenview, IL 60025–6159; telephone: (800) 255-8629.

ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

Visitors to the National Museum of American Art's home page can view selections from the permanent collection as well as highlights of temporary exhibitions at **http://www.nmaa.si.edu/artdir/treasures.html**.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's SunSITE features a WebMuseum with images of hundreds of famous paintings. The home page, at **http://sunsite.unc.edu/wm/paint/**, includes a glossary of painting terminology as well as an index of painters and periods, from thirteenth-century Gothic painting to twentieth-century pop art.

The University of Montana Museum of Fine Arts home page, **http://www.umt.edu/partv/famus/painting.htm**, features a variety of period paintings by artists from across the United States.

Note: Because of the rapidly evolving nature of the Internet, it is possible that the uniform resource locators (URLs) above may have changed since publication.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Cover:
Thomas Nast. *The Artist in the Mountains*.

Page 7:
George Catlin. *River Bluffs, 1,320 Miles above St. Louis*. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr.

Page 8:
Thomas Moran. *The Chasm of the Colorado*. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Lent by the U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of the Secretary.

Page 9:
Albert Bierstadt. *Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains, California*. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Bequest of Helen Huntington Hull, granddaughter of William Brown Dinsmore, who acquired the painting in 1873 for "The Locusts," the family estate in Dutchess County, New York.

Page 10:
Mount Matterhorn, southern Switzerland.

Photograph by Ansel Adams. Copyright © 1995 by the Trustees of the Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust. All rights reserved.

Page 12:
Philip C. Beam. *High Cliff, Prout's Neck*. Figure 42 in Beam, Philip C. *Winslow Homer at Prout's Neck*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1966.

Winslow Homer. *High Cliff, Coast of Maine*. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Gift of William T. Evans.

Page 13:
Saint Mary's, Cumberland Island, Georgia, home page, **http://www.gacoast.com/navigator/stmarys.html**

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ART TO ZOO ONLINE

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